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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the semantic structure of antonyms on the basis of some examples taken from Romanian. Both grammatical and lexical antonyms are considered with a view toward grasping the correspondence and differences between the two classes. Representative examples illustrate the following conclusions: (1) the distinction between lexical and grammatical antonyms is only a formal one; (2) the grammatical mark (the negative prefix) does not always show the direction of the semantic negation; (3) the intermediate term is designated by the same semantic marks as those of the first and last term; and (4) the oppositions materialized in the antonymous series have a more abstract character than other oppositions. It is expected that further typological studies will discover whether this situation is typical of Romanian or whether it corresponds to the semantic structure of other languages as well. (Author/AM)

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"Aspects of Antonymy in Romanian"

by

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We intend in this work to make a semantic analysis of antonyms on the basis of some examples taken from Romanian. We consider both grammatical and lexical antonyms with a view to grasping the correspondences and differences between the two classes. Without wanting to compile a complete list of Romanian antonyms, we are interested, however, in interpreting them as components of the vocabulary struture, an interpretation that relies on a limited number of representative examples.

The conclusions of this study run as follows:

1. The distinction between lexical and grammatical antonyms is only a formal one. The synonymy, for instance, of the words acord - înțelegere "agreement - compact" in correlation with neînțelegere - dezacord - disensiune "misunderstanding - disagreement - dissension"; noroc "goodluck" with nenoroc - ghinion "badluck - misfortune"; corect "correct" with incorect - greșit "incorrect - wrong"; mobil "mobile" with imobil - fix "immobile - immovable"; prieten "friend" with dușman - inamic "enemy - foe"; a crește "to encrease" with a scădea - a descrește "to diminish - to decrease", etc., illustrates this assertion. Hence, we shall record with the same semantical marks words as dezacord "disagreement" and disensiune "disension", nenoroc "bad luck" and ghinion "misfortune", imobil "immobile" and fix "immovable", a descrește "diminish" and a scădea "to decrease", etc. To this effect, we may assume the existence of the same type of semantic correlations between the terms of the antonymous couples no matter whether the opposed units are formally (grammatically) marked, such as is the case of grammatical antonyms, or are not marked, as is the case of lexical antonyms.

2. The grammatical mark - the negative prefix - does not always show "the direction" of the semantic negation. For instance in such couples as: schimbător - neschimbător "changeable - unchangeable", constant - inconstant "constant - inconstant", it may be noticed that the negative prefixes designate, by turns, synonymous terms in antonymous couples:

schimbător "changeable": (-Negative) formal on a semantic plane inconstant "inconstant" (+Negative) formal.

neschimbător "unchangeable": (+Negative) formal on a semantic plane constant: (-Negative) formal.

Likewisely:

sincer - nesincer "sincere - insincere"

prefăcut - neprefăcut "false - unfalse"

where

sincer "sincere": (-Negative) formal on a semantic plane neprefăcut "unfalse" (true)

nesincer "insincere": (+Negative) formal on a semantic plane prefăcut "false" etc.

Similarly, in the frequent cases of antonymy when one term (+Postive) and a second one (+Negative) imply the possibility of relating them to a third one (+Neuter), we notice that it is the term (+Neuter) and not the (+Negative) that may be expressed by a unit formally marked with the prefix (+Negative). For instance: neînsemnat "insignificant" in such a series as: simpatic "likeable" with the terms (+Neuter): neînsemnat (or oarecare) "insignificant or unimportant" with antipatic "unlikeable"; nepăsare "indifference" or ură "hatred" etc.

In this situation, in couples of the type: positive (=basis)/negative (=negative prefix + basis), -for instance: noroc/nenoroc "fortune/misfortune", corect/incorect "correct - incorrect", socoti/nesocoti "to regard/to disregard", etc., we may distinguish the negative unit as a marked term, conditional on the specification that we refer to the negative formal mark. This principle is valid also for words with any syntactic mark.

As to the semantic plane, the correlation follows, in our opinion, the same type of description:

- noroc "goodluck": (+Positive) in the couple noroc - ghinion (neroroc) "goodluck - misfortune (unluck)" where ghinion (nenoroc): (+Negative)
- ghinion (nenoroc): (+Positive) in the couple ghinion (nenoroc)- noroc, where noroc: (+Negative)
- corect "correct": (+Positive) in the couple corect - greşit (incorect) "correct - wrong (incorrect)" where greşit (incorect): (+Negative)
- greşit (incorect): (+Positive) in the couple greşit (incorect) - corect where corect: (+Negative)
- a socoti "to regard": (+Positive) in the couple a socoti - a ignora (nesocoti) "to regard - to ignore (to disregard)" where ignora - nesocoti: (+Negative)
- a ignora (nesocoti) "to ignore" to disregard": (+Positive) in the couple a ignora (nesocoti) "to ignore (to disregard)" - socoti "to regard" where socoti "to regard": (+Negative), etc.

The situation is equally obvious for the grammatical antonyms that postulate a term of reference, such as the formal negatives of moral "moral", the antonyms amoral "amoral" and imoral "immoral"; however, the semantic

negatives in this couple are: moral "moral" for amoral "amoral" and imoral "immoral"; amoral for moral and imoral; imoral for moral and amoral. Similarly, for lexical antonyms such as mare "big" which is the negative of mijlociu "middle-sized" and mic "small"; mijlociu "middle-sized" is the negative of mare "big" and mic "small"; mic "small" is the negative of mare "big" and mijlociu "middle-sized", etc.

3. The intermediate term (+Neuter) is designated by the same semantic marks as those of the first and last term.

4. The oppositions materialized in the antonymous series, irrespective of their being formed of two or three terms, have a more abstract character than other oppositions, as they are established between terms marked with (+), (-), ($\pm$).

Subsequent typological studies should find out whether this is a situation typical of the Romanian language or it corresponds to the semantic structure of other languages as well.